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Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force for the period from 1 January to 31 March 2013

I. Introduction

1. The present report gives an account of the activities of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), during the past three months, from 1 January to 31 March 2013, pursuant to the mandate contained in Security Council resolution 350 (1974) and extended by subsequent resolutions, most recently through resolution 2084 (2012).

II. Situation in the area and activities of the Force

2. During the period under review, the ceasefire in the Israel-Syrian Arab Republic sector was generally maintained, albeit in an increasingly volatile environment owing to the ongoing conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic. Over the past three months, the armed forces of the Syrian Arab Republic continued their deployment and carried out military activities and security operations against armed members of the opposition in the UNDOF area of operations. Inside the area of separation, the presence of the Syrian armed forces and unauthorized military equipment are in violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement. Numerous clashes took place between Syrian security forces and armed members of the opposition in the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side.

3. In the context of these confrontations, on 27 February, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) informed UNDOF that a tank shell fired by the Syrian armed forces had crossed the ceasefire line, but did not explode. UNDOF could not confirm this as it had not observed any firing across the ceasefire line. On 2 March, following an IDF report that shells fired from the Syrian side crossed the ceasefire line, UNDOF visited the location three hours after the reported incident and found that the metal fragments on the ground did not appear to have come from a newly fired round, and the Force was not, therefore, able to confirm this incident. In a letter dated 4 March 2013, the Permanent Representative of Israel informed me that on 27 February and 2 March fire from the Syrian Arab Republic had landed on the Israeli-occupied Golan, in violation of the Disengagement Agreement (S/2013/130). He urged the Security Council to address the situation, alerting the Council to the risk of escalation.

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4. The area of separation saw continued, often intense, clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, largely in the villages of Jabbata, Trunje, Al Horaye and Ufaniyah, as well as the forest in the vicinity of the ceasefire line in the north, and in the villages of Baraika and Bir Ajam in the south. Firing from inside and outside the area of separation, by artillery, mortars, main battle tanks, machine guns and anti-aircraft guns towards Jabbata, Trunje, Ufaniyah, Al Horaye, Al Quatanyia, Jaba, Bir Ajam and Baraika continued on a daily basis. There also have been continued clashes in the areas of Khan Arnabah, Al Baath and new Hamidiya, mainly along the UNDOF main supply road. Since the end of January, a Syrian armed forces main battle tank and an anti-aircraft gun have remained in the area of separation in the vicinity of Khan Arnabah and at Al Quatanyia, respectively.

5. In using its best efforts to maintain the ceasefire and to see that it is scrupulously observed, as prescribed by the Disengagement Agreement, UNDOF observed and reported instances of continued transborder movements of unidentified individuals, some of them armed, between Lebanon, and the Syrian Arab Republic in the northern part of the area of separation. Since the beginning of January, the number and the frequency of such activities have increased.

6. Syrian security forces have maintained the checkpoints established inside the area of separation since they began military operations in the area. Syrian armed forces personnel have also maintained checkpoints at the eastern entrances to the area of separation in order to control and restrict traffic. The checkpoints have often interfered with the freedom of movement of UNDOF and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) military observers operationally integrated into the Force as Observer Group Golan. Restrictions on the movement of UNDOF and Observer Group Golan in the areas of separation and limitation as a result of the clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition have increased. The situation has resulted in the frequent closure of the UNDOF main supply road, which has hampered the movements of UNDOF between Camp Faouar on the Bravo side and Camp Ziouni on the Alpha side. At times, UNDOF has resorted to the use of bypass roads, which are not accessible at night. The Senior Syrian Arab Delegate, the main interlocutor for UNDOF on the Bravo side, advised UNDOF that, for security reasons, all United Nations personnel should avoid areas where clashes were ongoing.

7. On a number of occasions, during clashes between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, fire landed in close proximity to United Nations personnel and facilities, forcing United Nations personnel to seek shelter. Between 6 and 22 January, UNDOF observed gunfire and several detonations in the vicinity of Camp Faouar. On 22 January, gunfire and mortar rounds landed in close proximity to United Nations observation post 58, located in the area of limitation on the Bravo side. The same observation post suffered damage from the impact of small arms and indirect fire on 2 and 3 March. The military observers manning the post had to be extricated to safety by UNDOF troops. As a result of continued heavy clashes between Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition in the vicinity of Al Jamlah, the observation post was temporarily vacated. On 24 February, the stone wall of United Nations position 32 was hit by a stray bullet. During the reporting period, shots were fired, on seven occasions, at UNDOF personnel and Observer Group Golan military observers carrying out activities in clearly marked United Nations vehicles and, at times, at United Nations positions in

the area of separation. No United Nations personnel were injured in these incidents. Two United Nations vehicles were damaged by gunfire on two separate occasions. On 28 February, armed elements entered United Nations observation post 52 and stole equipment from the facility.

8. Following the easing of heavy clashes between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition in the vicinity of Al Jamlah and United Nations observation post 58 on 6 March, an UNDOF convoy of four vehicles, comprising 21 military personnel returning from a routine supply task, was stopped and detained for three days by a group of approximately 30 armed persons. Members of the armed group, which identified itself as the "Brigade of the Martyrs of Yarmouk", forcibly took the keys of the United Nations vehicles in which the UNDOF personnel were travelling to prevent them from leaving the location. In their contact with UNDOF, the armed group demanded that the Syrian armed forces withdraw all heavy equipment to a distance of 20 kilometres from the location. On 9 March, the armed group released the 21 peacekeepers, after having relocated them to Jordan. Throughout the incident, United Nations and other interlocutors utilized multiple channels to secure the release of the peacekeepers, including close liaison between UNDOF and the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate in an attempt to halt the fighting that had resumed in the vicinity of Al Jamlah. UNDOF personnel departed Jordan and arrived safely in Camp Ziouani on the Alpha side on 11 March. The four United Nations vehicles are yet to be recovered. In a letter addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council, the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic to the United Nations, commented on this incident and highlighted the cooperation his Government provided to UNDOF in efforts to secure their release.

9. In other incidents involving United Nations personnel, on 29 January, two United Nations vehicles with a total of four peacekeepers on board were forced to stop by armed members of the opposition in the vicinity of Khan Aisheh in the area of limitation and driven at gunpoint to an unknown location in the vicinity of Khan Aisheh. One United Nations peacekeeper was released and the remaining three were detained for approximately four hours. The two United Nations vehicles were taken by the armed persons and have not been recovered. On 9 February, a group of five individuals, three of them armed, stopped two UNDOF personnel on a regular patrol at a checkpoint at Hadar junction in the area of separation, grabbed two rifles, some ammunition and magazines from the United Nations vehicle and fled the location. Two members of Observer Group Golan travelling in a United Nations vehicle towards United Nations observation post 58 were stopped by armed persons, who forcibly took the United Nations vehicle in the vicinity of Al Shibri on 11 February. This United Nations vehicle also has not been recovered. On 14 February, four members of an Observer Group Golan inspection team travelling towards Jaseem in the area of separation, escorted by four armed UNDOF military personnel, were detained for one hour by Syrian armed forces personnel manning a checkpoint in the area of limitation.

10. UNDOF has protested the presence of Syrian armed forces and equipment in the area of separation, the firing into and inside the area of separation and the firing at United Nations personnel and facilities. The UNDOF Force Commander continues to remind the Syrian authorities of their obligation to halt the continued operations of the Syrian armed forces in the area of separation, to cease firing from the area of limitation and to abide by the terms of the Disengagement Agreement.

The Force Commander and other senior United Nations officials conveyed the same message to Syrian officials, including the Minister of Defence and the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs. On 9 March, the Permanent Representative of the Syrian Arab Republic addressed another letter to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council concerning the activities of armed members of the opposition in the UNDOF area of operations, including the reported transport across the ceasefire line of injured persons to the Israeli-occupied Golan and back, in addition to incidents involving UNDOF personnel.

11. During the reporting period, a number of incidents of violations of the Disengagement Agreement by IDF occurred. On 18 January, three Israeli jets flew across the ceasefire line, briefly flying over the areas of separation and limitation on the Bravo side. On 20 January, one unidentified aircraft from the Alpha side also flew over the area of separation. Eight IDF soldiers on foot briefly entered the area of separation on 20 January. On 13 February, 10 IDF soldiers also momentarily entered the area of separation. UNDOF protested these incidents to IDF as violations of the Disengagement Agreement. On 31 January, Syrian authorities protested to the UNDOF Force Commander that Israeli planes had flown over the area of separation and targeted a Syrian centre for scientific research site on 30 January, resulting in seven casualties, including two fatalities. UNDOF was not able to confirm the incident as it had not observed any planes flying over the area of separation. UNDOF noted that bad weather conditions had hampered visibility on that date. On 31 January, the Secretary-General issued a statement expressing grave concern at reports of Israeli air strikes in the Syrian Arab Republic and noting that the United Nations did not have details of the reported incident nor was it in a position to independently verify what had occurred.

12. The UNDOF Force Commander has maintained close liaison with the IDF on security developments in the area of separation, encouraging maximum restraint. During the Syrian security operations, IDF reinforced their troops along the technical fence as a precautionary measure. UNDOF maintained close liaison with IDF and the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate throughout the operations.

13. Within this extremely challenging operational environment, UNDOF, through Observer Group Golan, supervised the area of separation by manning fixed positions and patrols to ensure that military forces of either party were excluded from it. UNDOF carried out fortnightly inspections of equipment and force levels in the areas of limitation, where security conditions allowed. Liaison officers from the Alpha side accompanied Observer Group Golan inspection teams. On the Bravo side, the Syrian authorities did not resume the practice of providing liaison officers to accompany Observer Group Golan inspection teams, which was ceased in July 2012 following the abduction, by unknown armed persons, of a Syrian liaison officer accompanying the military observers in the area of limitation. As in the past, both sides denied inspection teams access to some of their positions and imposed restrictions on the Force's freedom of movement. Beyond such routine and temporary restrictions, Observer Group Golan continued to encounter restrictions of movement in the southern and central parts of the area of limitation on the Bravo side, where both Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition have interfered with the conduct of Observer Group Golan patrols. Syrian authorities denied access, largely in the vicinities of As Sharajah, Al Harrah, Jaseem, Kanakir, Namir, Nawa and Tasil, ostensibly for reasons of safety and security of the military observers.

14. UNDOF continued to adapt its operational posture to the ongoing IDF training activities and new military construction in the area of limitation on the Alpha side, the expansion of civilian development in proximity to the ceasefire line in the area of separation and increased military activities from Syrian armed forces positions along the Bravo line. IDF continued to enhance the technical fence and established additional physical obstacles along the technical fence to prevent people from crossing from the area of separation. Both sides maintained existing defensive positions in the respective areas of limitation. Israeli customs officials continued to operate periodically at the IDF post at the UNDOF crossing gate between the Israeli-occupied Golan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

15. The Force continued to assist the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) with the passage of persons through the area of separation. During the past three months, UNDOF assisted eight students in crossing through the area and facilitated the release of five Syrian civilians who were apprehended and detained by IDF on the Alpha side after allegedly crossing the ceasefire line. UNDOF provided medical treatment to 124 civilians, in addition to the immediate first aid and emergency medical treatment provided at United Nations position 37 to two injured unarmed persons on 4 and 6 January, on a strictly humanitarian basis.

16. In the UNDOF area of operations, especially in the vicinity of the Alpha line in the area of separation, mines continued to pose a threat to UNDOF personnel and local inhabitants. However, owing to the long-term presence of the mines and the deterioration of their detonation systems, the threat has increased. With enhanced mine clearing and detection capacity, UNDOF continued to carry out operational mine clearance.

17. The UNDOF Force Commander and his staff maintained close contact with the military authorities of Israel and of the Syrian Arab Republic.

18. UNDOF continued its efforts to liaise with local authorities and engage with the local population to explain the mission's mandate and activities. This was also important in the light of the security situation in the UNDOF area of operation, and as part of the effort to ensure the safety and security of United Nations personnel on the ground.

19. As of 12 March 2013, UNDOF comprised 1,008 troops from: Austria 374; the Philippines 343; India 194; and Croatia 97. On 28 February, the Permanent Mission of Croatia informed the Department of Peacekeeping Operations that the Government of Croatia had decided to withdraw all Croatian military personnel from UNDOF owing to the deteriorating security situation. From 27 February, all operations of the Croatian contingent within UNDOF were restricted to static activities. Between the end of December 2012 and mid-January 2013, Japan withdrew its 31 military personnel and a national support element of 15 persons from UNDOF. The withdrawal of the Japanese contingent has affected the transportation, engineering and logistics capabilities of UNDOF. The process of seeking a troop-contributing country to replace Japan is under way. In addition, 79 military observers from UNTSO assisted the Force in carrying out its tasks.

20. Further to the request of the Security Council in the resolution 2084 (2012), a number of steps have been taken to ensure that the Force has the capacity necessary to fulfil its mandate in a safe and secure way. UNDOF has put in place a series of mitigation measures in response to new threats in its operational environment. The

mission enhanced efforts to ensure its necessary strategic reserve and its self-sustainment capability. UNDOF also continued to implement its rehabilitation programme to maintain and upgrade its equipment and infrastructure, in an effort to ensure its operational and security capacity. Additional armoured personnel carriers have been deployed to UNDOF, with a view to enhancing force protection. All UNDOF personnel were equipped with personal protection kits and provided with the appropriate training. Furthermore, the Secretariat facilitated the deployment to UNDOF of a civilian security surge capability, comprising security personnel from the Secretariat and United Nations peacekeeping missions in the region to assist the Force in reassessing its security structure and processes in order to effectively mitigate identified security risks.

21. A military capability study of UNDOF was jointly conducted by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and UNDOF in January 2013 in order to assess the capabilities of UNDOF to safely and securely fulfil its mandate within the context of the evolving security situation. The study recommended physical and operational risk mitigation measures in view of current and foreseen challenges. It concluded that, in addition to the measures UNDOF has put in place, there was a need to further support the efforts of the mission to adapt, strengthen and reconfigure its capabilities to the ongoing situation. The recommendations of the study largely focused on the enhancement of force protection and information analysis capacities.

22. Under the prevailing volatile conditions, UNDOF has temporarily adjusted its activities to focus on static operations and enhancing liaison with the parties in an effort to reduce the exposure of personnel to risk. UNDOF temporarily suspended its mobile operations and night patrols on the Bravo side. In recent weeks, United Nations observation post 58 and position 80A were temporarily closed as they had become extremely vulnerable to the continued heavy clashes in their vicinity. In addition, patrols by Observer Group Golan have been suspended temporarily. UNDOF is implementing further mitigating measures, including the temporary closure of observation posts manned by Observer Group Golan that are in isolated locations and therefore at risk. In view of the imminent withdrawal of the Croatian contingent from UNDOF, the mission intends to temporarily close some positions that were manned by the contingent. The inspection by Observer Group Golan of military positions in the area of limitation on the Bravo side is to be temporarily suspended, with physical verifications carried out as may be necessary. The above adjustments will contribute towards enhancing certain capabilities of UNDOF through the temporary refocus of activities of a number of military observers of Observer Group Golan from patrolling and inspection to liaison and reporting tasks.

23. An UNDOF platoon at Camp Ziouani has been put on standby, ready to reinforce United Nations position 60 on the Bravo side, where an alternative battalion command post has been established on a permanent basis. In addition, a third platoon created for the Force headquarters company in October 2012 remains in place at Camp Ziouani.

24. In my report of 30 November 2012 (S/2012/897), I informed the Security Council that, should the situation in the Syrian Arab Republic deteriorate and result in conditions under which it is no longer feasible for UNDOF to use the airport in Damascus, it would be necessary for UNDOF to use alternative ports of entry and departure for mission personnel, including staff officers and contingent members. In

December 2012, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations informed the Security Council of the events of 29 and 30 November 2012 involving UNDOF personnel on a scheduled rotation activity. On 29 November, an UNDOF convoy carrying outgoing troops came under fire along the road between Camp Faouar and Damascus International Airport. The convoy had proceeded after the Senior Syrian Arab Delegate and Syrian armed forces on the spot declared that the highway to the airport was safe and secure. Five UNDOF personnel were injured, two seriously, as a result of the incident. On the following day, 30 November, UNDOF convoys of armoured vehicles tasked to bring the incoming troops from the airport to Camp Faouar again came under fire to and from the airport. The perpetrators have not been identified. In the light of the events of 29 and 30 November and the deteriorating security situation in the Syrian Arab Republic, it is no longer feasible for UNDOF to carry out troop and individual staff officer rotations through the airport in Damascus. Due to the security situation along the routes on the Bravo side to the UNDOF area of operation, the safe entry of UNDOF personnel into the Syrian Arab Republic through the border with Lebanon or Jordan cannot be ensured. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has therefore informed the Syrian authorities that, temporarily, it will be necessary for UNDOF to use an alternative port of entry and departure for mission personnel, including staff officers and contingent members, to ensure safe and secure rotation activities.

25. The conditions on the ground also have had an impact on UNDOF personnel and mission support. A number of UNDOF national staff have been working from home as they are not able to report for work on a regular basis due to the security situation.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 338 (1973)

26. The Security Council, when deciding in its resolution 2084 (2012) to renew the mandate of UNDOF for a further period of six months, until 31 June 2013, also called upon the parties concerned to immediately implement its resolution 338 (1973) and requested the Secretary-General to submit, at the end of the period, a report on developments in the situation and the measures taken to implement that resolution. The search for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East, in particular the efforts undertaken at various levels to implement resolution 338 (1973), was dealt with in my report on the situation in the Middle East (A/67/342) submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 66/18, entitled "Jerusalem", and 66/19, entitled "The Syrian Golan".

27. Since the discontinuation of indirect peace talks in December 2008, there have been no negotiations between the parties, and the Syrian crisis currently impedes prospects of their resumption and progress towards peace between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic. I look forward to a peaceful resolution of the crisis and the resumption of efforts towards a comprehensive, just and durable peace settlement, as called for by the Security Council in its resolution 338 (1973) and other relevant resolutions adopted by the Council.

IV. Observations

28. I remain deeply concerned about the considerable escalation of the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic, its impact on the Syrian population and its potential implications on the entire region. The situation is deteriorating, and it has affected the UNDOF area of operations significantly. The continued military activities in the area of separation have the potential to escalate tensions between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic and to jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries and the stability of the region. All military activities in the area of separation conducted by any actor pose a risk to the long-held ceasefire and the local civilian population, as well as United Nations personnel on the ground.

29. The presence of Syrian Arab armed forces and unauthorized military equipment in the area of separation is a grave violation of the 1974 Disengagement of Forces Agreement between Israeli and Syrian forces. I call on all parties to the Syrian domestic conflict to cease military actions throughout the country, including the UNDOF area of operations. I also call upon Israel to continue to exercise maximum restraint to prevent escalation of the situation. The commitment to the Disengagement Agreement must be upheld by both parties.

30. The military operations carried out by the Syrian Arab armed forces and the armed members of the opposition have adversely affected the efforts of UNDOF to effectively carry out the mandated tasks. I am also deeply concerned by the evolution of the nature and increase in the number of incidents involving United Nations personnel on the ground. The mandate of UNDOF remains an important element in ensuring the stability of the region. It should be recalled that UNDOF was established by the Security Council with the agreement of Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, and that its mandate was prescribed by the Disengagement Agreement and its Protocol. UNDOF is mandated to maintain the ceasefire between Israel and the Syrian Arab Republic, to see that it is scrupulously observed and to supervise the Agreement and the Protocol thereto with regard to the areas of separation and limitation.

31. The increased risk the situation poses to the United Nations on the ground, as highlighted by the recent events, in particular the detention of 21 UNDOF military personnel, the firing directed at United Nations personnel and facilities and the carjacking of United Nations vehicles, is unacceptable. I reiterate to all parties concerned the impartiality of United Nations peacekeepers. I call on all parties to respect the Force's freedom of movement and the safety and security of its personnel.

32. The prevailing situation has also continued to disrupt UNDOF support and logistic activities on an almost daily basis, thus complicating enormously the ability of the mission to effectively carry out its mandated tasks. It is essential that the parties provide all the necessary support to ensure appropriate conditions for United Nations personnel on the ground and cooperate fully in the facilitation of support and logistic activities of the mission.

33. The Secretariat continues to do its utmost to support UNDOF in efforts to ensure mandate implementation while mitigating risk to its personnel. UNDOF has made significant adjustments to its operations, on a temporary basis, to adapt to the conditions on the ground, including reducing mobile activities, focusing on observation, reporting and liaison tasks and closing positions to minimize risk to

personnel. Efforts are under way to implement the immediate priorities identified by the military capability study. I would recall that the primary responsibility for the safety and security of United Nations personnel in the area of separation and the area of limitation on the Bravo side rests with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, and I call on that Government to facilitate fully the efforts of the mission to continue implementing its mandate safely and securely. It is imperative that respect for the privileges and immunities of UNDOF and its freedom of movement be ensured. In addition, although UNDOF continues to engage with the local population in its area of operations in order to inform them of its mandate and activities, it is critical that countries with influence impress upon all opposition groups and actors the importance of ensuring the freedom of movement and the safety of United Nations personnel on the ground.

34. It is equally critical that the Security Council continue to bring its influence to bear on the parties concerned to ensure that UNDOF is accorded the ability to operate freely and securely within its area of operations. It is important that UNDOF have at its disposal all necessary means and resources to carry out its mandate safely and securely. The continued support of troop-contributing countries to UNDOF is dependent on the ability of the mission to continue to implement its mandate in a safe and secure manner.

35. In conclusion, I wish to express my appreciation to the Force Commander, Major General Iqbal Singh Singha, and the military and civilian personnel serving under his leadership. These women and men, in challenging circumstances, continue to perform with efficiency and commitment the important tasks assigned to them by the Security Council. I have full confidence that UNDOF will continue to carry out its mission effectively. I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Governments contributing troops to UNDOF and to those providing the UNTSO military observers assigned to the Force.